

**Subject:** English Language Arts

**Title:** Influence of Setting on Characters in Portal 2

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**School / Organization, City and State / Province:** Bellevue Big Picture School, Bellevue, WA

**Grade Level:** 7

**Standards Met:**

*English Language Arts Standards*

Reading Literature, Key Ideas and Details

*Common Core Standards*

*Reading Literature 7.3 Key Ideas and Details:* Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

**Time Needed:** Two 50 minute periods

**Objective(s):** Examine and describe character and setting. Analyze how characters are driven or influenced by the setting.

**Summary:** Students take notes on the Characters and Setting in the introduction and first few levels of Portal 2. From these notes and descriptions they examine how characters are influenced by the setting of the story.

**Vocabulary:** Setting, Character, Plot

**Teacher Materials Needed:** None

**Student Materials Needed:** Portal 2, student handout, writing utensil

## PART ONE:

**Introductory Activity:** 15 minutes (3-5 minutes writing, 5-7 minutes discussing, 5 minutes defining objective)

1. Provide the students with a short writing or discussion prompt to get them thinking about stories or even video games as stories.

*Possible Prompts:*

“What makes a story?”

“Do stories have to be written?”

“Can video games tell stories?”

“Have you ever played a video game that also tells a great story?”

2. Ask for volunteers to share a few ideas from their response to the prompt.
3. Bring the discussion to present the idea of looking at video games as a text or analyzing the stories in video games the same way we analyze stories in literature or books.
4. Define Objective: Clearly define the learning objectives and expectations for the activities.
5. Make sure students know they will need to pay attention to details as they play the game. The more details they notice, the deeper they will be able to analyze the story of the game.

**Implementation:** about 30 minutes

1. Gameplay and Note-taking: Students should take part in the game while taking notes on character and setting.
2. See the provided handouts.
3. Students may either work alone, taking notes as they go, or in a small group, alternating playing and taking notes.
4. During this stage, students should be concentrating on gathering detailed observations of the characters and the setting.

**Closing Activity:** *(if ending for the day, if not continue on)* - 5 minutes

1. Have a brief discussion or provide a prompt for an exit ticket to tie together some of the lesson's ideas.
2. Ask students if they think the video game tells a story or if they found story elements similar to literary stories.
3. You may want to collect the students' handouts to observe how they completed the first side and return to them during the next part.

## PART TWO:

### Introductory Activity: 5 minutes

1. Students should review the notes they took while playing the game.

### Implementation: about 40 minutes (7 think, 3 pair, 10 share discussion, 20 discussing or writing)

1. This is a Think-Pair-Share on how the setting in the game influences the characters.
2. Students should take several minutes to answer the questions on the back of handout.
3. After recording their own ideas, have the students briefly discuss their ideas with a partner.
4. Ask students to share ideas they wrote down or discussed.
5. Students should add to their notes if they hear an idea they agree with.

### *Class Discussion or Writing Assignment - 20 minutes*

#### *Writing Activity*

1. Students should write a short expository essay on how the setting influences the characters in *Portal 2*.
2. Have the students support their ideas with specific examples from the game.

#### *Class Discussion*

1. Continue discussing how the setting influences the characters.
2. Use a Socratic seminar or other class discussion method to give all students a chance to share and discuss.
3. Use questions to encourage deeper group discussion and facilitate the discussion to stay on task.

#### *Possible discussion questions:*

How would the characters act in a different setting?

Would the characters be happy to be somewhere else? Why?

Can the characters make their own choices?

How would the story change if it were in a different time period?

### Closing Activity: 5 minutes

1. Have students complete an exit ticket in the last few minutes of class.
2. Base the exit ticket question on where you intend to go after this lesson. Suggested options below.

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Continue with a traditional literary analysis lesson or use similar questions to analyze a piece of reading.
2. This will facilitate in students' transfer of the ideas in this lesson to analyzing literature.
3. To lead in to this lesson, use the exit ticket question, "While analyzing *Portal 2*, what did you learn that would help you analyze a written story?"

#### *Creative Writing*

1. Challenge students to write a creative adaptation of the beginning of *Portal 2*.
2. Have them use their notes and focus on describing the characters and setting.

- Continue to teach any elements of creative writing or adaptation that you have been working on.
- To lead into this exercise, use the exit ticket question, “How would the story of *Portal 2* be similar or different if it were a written short story?”

## Grading:

### *Pre-Assessment - Optional*

Provide this simple assessment before starting the unit. This is particularly effective if you intend to have students write an essay analyzing the influence of setting on characters in *Portal 2*. Compare this pre-assessment to the essay at the end. Use the rubric to gauge what students know at the beginning of the lesson and what they are able to do at the end.

*Pre-Assessment* - Ask students to think of a story that they recently read (or possibly watched). You may also want to use a story that you have all read in class or read a short story together. Students should consider that story and complete the following prompts and questions.

Describe the **characters** of this story:

Describe the **setting** (time and place) of this story

How are the characters **influenced** by the setting?

Description and Analysis Rubric for Written Analysis of Character and Setting in *Portal 2*

	<b>4 Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>3 Meets Expectations</b>	<b>2 Progressing</b>	<b>1 Not There Yet</b>
<b>Descriptions of Character</b>	Extensively described each of the following for both characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how they look</li> <li>• how they act</li> <li>• their goals</li> <li>• their possible feelings</li> <li>• challenges they face</li> </ul> Provided evidence from the video game.	Described each of the following for both characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how they look</li> <li>• how they act</li> <li>• their goals</li> <li>• their possible feelings</li> <li>• challenges they face</li> </ul>	Described only some of the following for both characters OR described all of the following for only one character: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how they look</li> <li>• how they act</li> <li>• their goals</li> <li>• their possible feelings</li> <li>• challenges they face</li> </ul>	Minimal description of the following for either character: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how they look</li> <li>• how they act</li> <li>• their goals</li> <li>• their possible feelings</li> <li>• challenges they face</li> </ul>

	<b>4 Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>3 Meets Expectations</b>	<b>2 Progressing</b>	<b>1 Not There Yet</b>
<b>Descriptions of Setting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Extensively described the looks of the living quarters (in the introduction and wake up call) and the testing chamber.</li> <li>•Extensively described the atmosphere or mood of the setting and tried to guess the time period of the events using many detailed examples.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Described the looks of the living quarters (in the introduction and wake up call) and the testing chamber.</li> <li>•Described the atmosphere or mood of the setting and tried to guess the time period of the events.</li> </ul>	Missing descriptions of some of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The looks of the living quarters (in the introduction and wake up call) and the testing chamber.</li> <li>•The atmosphere or mood of the setting.</li> <li>•No evidence for guess on time period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Minimal descriptions of locations without supporting details from the game.</li> <li>•Does not attempt to identify the time period of the actions.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis of how characters are influenced by setting</b>	Clearly identifies how the characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Are influenced by the setting.</li> <li>•Feel about the setting.</li> </ul> And supports ideas with specific examples from the game. Discusses how the characters would react in a different setting.	Identifies how the characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Are influenced by the setting.</li> <li>•Feel about the setting.</li> </ul> AND Supports ideas with examples from the game.	Minimally identifies how the characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Are influenced by the setting.</li> <li>•Feel about the setting.</li> </ul> OR does not Support ideas with examples from the game.	Does not identify how the characters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Are influenced by the setting.</li> <li>•Feel about the setting.</li> </ul>

# TEACHWITHPORTALS™

**TASK:** Examine and describe *character* and *setting*.

**Instructions:**

As you play or observe the game, take notes below on the **character** and **setting**.

**TIP:**

Press *ESC* to pause the game and write down your ideas.

**KEY TERMS:**

Character: The *people* (or *robots*) in a story.

Setting: The *time* and *place* of a story.

Plot: The *events* that happen in a story.

**Character:**

Describe each character. Describe what they look like, how they act, their goals, and how you think they feel.

**Setting:**

Describe the places the characters are in. Describe how the place looks. In what time period do you think it is?

**Summarize your notes when you are done playing:**

Who are the main characters? What challenges do the characters face?

How would you describe the atmosphere or mood created by the setting?

**TASK:** Analyze how the *characters* are influenced by the *setting*.

**Instructions:** Review your notes as you answer the questions below. Provide details and examples.

**Questions:**

Are the characters in conflict with the setting? What do the characters want?

Does the setting keep them from getting what they want?

How do you think the characters feel about the setting?

**Summary:**

Write about all the ways that you think the setting influences the characters.

What things do the characters do because of the setting they are in?

Name:

# TEACHWITHPORTALS™

**Answer the questions as you play the game.**

## **Introduction of the game**

*Setting:*

1. **Where** are you?

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2. **When** does this take place? (circle one)

**Past**

**Present**

**Future**

3. Describe the **place** you are.

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4. How do you think this **place** makes your **character feel**?  
(use the feelings word bank)

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## **Courtesy Call**

5. **Where** are you?

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6. How much **time** has passed since the last scene? (circle one)

**1 day**

**1 year**

**A long, long time**

7. Describe the **place** you are.

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8. How do you think this **place** makes your **character feel**?  
(use the feelings word bank)

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*Character:*

9. A new **character** comes to your door. What does this character **look** like?

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10. How does he **act**?

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11. How do you think this character **feels** about **where** he is?

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12. You move to a new **place**. What does it **look and sound like**?

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13. How do you think it makes your **character feel**?

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14. What are the **characters** (including your character) **trying to do**?

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15. How do the characters **feel** about this **environment** or **place**?

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16. How would you describe the **atmosphere** or **mood** created by the **setting**?  
(Gloomy, cheerful, mysterious, threatening, ?)

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happy	angry	alive	depressed	
good	interested	confused	strong	
helpless	joyous	afraid	playful	sad
calm	bitter	thrilled	lost	
fascinated				
nervous	certain	bored	curious	

## **Feelings Word Bank**

To be used with accompanying handout.